

Mahāyāna Schools of Thought: Madhyamaka and Yogācāra

HT 2009, Week 2: *Buddhism in History and Society*

Course website on WebLearn:
<http://tinyurl.com/5v7krj> Week 2

Madhyamaka (The Middle Way School)

A further development of the doctrine of emptiness propounded in the *Perfection of Wisdom* literature

Ārya Nāgārjuna (*ca.* 2nd c. CE) and his disciple Āryadeva - credited as the founders of the Madhyamaka

The Middle Way between nihilism (*uccheda-vāda*) and eternalism/substantialism (*śāśvata-vāda*)

The earliest occurrence of the terms “Madhyamaka” and “Mādhyamika” in Sanskrit sources - Candrakīrti’s *Prasannapadā-madhyamaka-vṛtti* (7th cent.)

Previous Misconceptions of Madhyamaka

- Nihilism
 - Agnosticism
 - Scepticism
 - Mysticism
 - Criticism
 - Philosophical “zerology”
 - Linguistic analysis with therapeutic value
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| Monism |
| Irrationalism |
| Misology |
| Absolutism |
| Nominalism |
- Scherbatsky: “explanatory principle” (Erklärungsprinzip), which excludes any real plurality in the sense of a monistic knowledge and not in the sense of a monistic reality

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*)

- Absence of inherent existence (*niḥsvabhāva*, *svabhāva-śūnya*)

For something to have an inherent existence is to exist in its own right.

If things were not empty of inherent existence we would live in a static world, devoid of any activity and possibility for spiritual progress

Emptiness is a quality of phenomena not a substance constituting phenomena

It is neither a thing nor nothingness.

Nāgārjuna on Emptiness (*MMK*)

Emptiness is a dependent origination (*pratītyasamutpāda*), which is devoid of 8 limiting conditions—cessation, origination, interruption, eternity, distinctiveness, non-differentiatedness, coming, and going

“Nowhere and never are things found to arise from themselves, from something else, from both, nor without a cause.” (v. 1)

All conditioned phenomena are empty of inherent existence and are therefore unreal.

Nāgārjuna's Tetralema (*catuṣkoṭi*)

1. A thing [truly] exists.
2. A thing does not [truly] exist
3. A thing exists and does not exist
4. A thing neither exists nor does not exist

The truth is free from these four extremes.

Nāgārjuna on Emptiness (*MMK*)

The inherent nature of a phenomenon is not found in the conditions upon which it arises

For as long as a thing is non-arisen, conditioning factors do not exist either

For an inherently existent or a non-existent phenomenon, a conditioning factor is logically impossible.

The first does not need a condition to make it what it already is, and no condition can effectively relate to the inherently non-existent phenomenon

Nāgārjuna on Emptiness (*MMK*)

A result is not present in its insubstantial conditions.

What is not found in conditions cannot be produced from them.

A result consists of its conditioning factors, but these factors are not made up of themselves.

Therefore, their result is not REALLY their result.

There is no substantive result that comes from a real causal nexus of substantive conditions or non-conditions.

In Which Way Do Things Exist?

All things exist by means of conceptual designation, or superimposition

All phenomena, including the Buddha, *nirvāṇa*, etc. are imputed by the mind.

To see phenomena as empty is to see them as mental constructs, not existing from their own side, but as illusions, as dream-like appearances

One who knows this does not expect to find any realities behind conceptual designations. One knows that things themselves are inexpressible

Madhyamaka on Language

- Emptiness cannot be properly be expressed in words.
- The Buddha is same as speechless silence.
- Linguistic constructs are not the truth.
- Words do not represent the objective referents that exist outside the language.
- Language determines how we experience the world, but it does not bring the world into existence.
- Language itself is an empty phenomenon.

Emptiness as Nonduality

Phenomena devoid of inherent existence do not have their own distinctive properties, which keep them apart

All phenomena are ultimately nondual

Nonduality of suffering and bliss can be experienced only by brave Bodhisattvas, who welcome suffering when it assists others

Knowing *saṃsāra* and *nirvāṇa* to be nondual, Bodhisattvas do not avoid *saṃsāra* in their work for others.

They are sustained by the idea that *nirvāṇa* is already present in *saṃsāra* and there is nothing to what one could escape.

Results of Freedom from the Four Dogmatic Positions

- Ability to see the non-duality of wisdom and compassion
- Ability to cultivate sublime compassion without an object (*nirāḷambana-karuṇā*), or sublime compassion (*mahā-karuṇā*)

Nāgārjuna on the Self and No-Self

The inherent identity and the inherent identitylessness are imagined by the foolish.

In some places the Buddha taught the Self, in other places he taught the not-Self, and in some other places he taught neither the Self nor not-Self.

To materialists (Cārvākas) he taught the Self

To those given to egotism, he taught the not-Self.

To those free of egotism he taught that there is neither the Self nor not-Self

Yogācāra

Yogācāra - “a practitioner of *yoga*,” “the practice of *yoga*”

Citta-mātra - “the mind only” in the sense that nothing else has left, no thoughts, etc.

Vijñāna-vāda - “propagation of consciousness”

Founded by Asaṅga (*ca.* the 4th-5th centuries)

Emphasized a meditative concentration (*samādhi*) as the means of approaching reality

Two Main Groups

- The followers of scriptures (Asaṅga's *Abhidharma-samuccaya*):
a repository consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*) constitutes a person
- The followers of reasoning (Dharmakīrti's *Pramāṇa-samuccaya*):
a mental consciousness (*mano-vijñāna*) constitutes a person

The Reality of Consciousness

Everything is a mental image, a representation of consciousness.

The mind is real although empty. Nothing else is real

If the mind were not real, it would not be able to perceive an object.

A *samādhi* on an object can generate an image that is more vivid than the object seen with the opened eyes.

If an advanced meditator can change the earth into the water, it means that the earth and the water are not really outside the mind.

The Mind and Perception

A perception of an object is a non-perception, since the object does not really exist. It lacks the essential feature of perception—the feature of perceiving reality

It is called “perception” in the sense that it represents the objects, which are ultimately unreal

If there is no object to perceive, there is no subject of perception

Eight Types of Consciousness

SIX TYPES plus:

1. **AFFLICTED MIND** (*kliṣṭa-manas*) – has repository consciousness as its object and considers it to be an independent “I”
2. **REPOSITORY CONSCIOUSNESS** (*ālaya-vijñāna*) - subliminal, self-cognizing mind to which we cling as our Self, the container of karmic seeds and habitual propensities

These two are different from the other 6 types of consciousness

The Afflicted Mind (*klista-manas*)

Accompanied by 9 mental factors, 4 of which are defiling

1. Attachment to the Self
2. Obscuration concerning the Self
3. Pride in the Self
4. View of the Self

When free from these defiling factors it become neutral but not eradicated

In Buddhahood, it becomes the gnosis of equality (*samatā-jñāna*), which sees all phenomena as equal and not as the phenomena different from the mind that perceives them

Repository Consciousness

It is the life-principle that pervades the entire body, even the unconscious states.

It is the basis for the six types of consciousness.

Karmic seeds and habitual propensities reproduce themselves over time and are stored in a repository-consciousness (*ālaya-vijñāna*)

It is aware of its habitual propensities only indirectly because all perceptions are produced by habitual propensities

Why is a Repository Consciousness Mistaken for the “I”?

It guarantees the continuity and homogeneity of a particular form of existence throughout one's lifetime.

Repository consciousness provides a link between the death and rebirth, *karma* and its result, but it itself is neutral

Its theory explains how memories and habitual propensities from the past *karma* are transmitted from one life to another

How is Repository Consciousness a Consciousness?

Accompanied by 5 omnipresent mental factors: contact, feeling, discernment, intention, attention

Not accompanied by defiling mental factors – hence not defiled

It is neither virtuous nor non-virtuous for these reasons:

- Present in the mental continuum of a person who has not eradicated the roots of non-virtue
- Present in the consciousness of beings in the realms of form and formlessness

Is a Repository Consciousness To Be Eradicated and How?

The container of the imprints of ignorance and mental afflictions - to be eradicated

The container of virtuous mental factors and positive karmic imprints - transferred from the Buddha's mind to one's consciousness through Buddhist teaching - do not constitute the repository consciousness and are different from it

Transformation of the basis (*āśraya-pravṛti*) – prevention of the seeds into actions that give rise to habitual propensities, which create more seeds – replacing one's depravities (*daṣṭhulya*) with calming thoughts (*praśrabdhi*) through meditation

A Repository Consciousness as a Basis of Transformation

- A transformation of a repository consciousness = a cessation of the repository consciousness > there is no longer a place for karmic seeds to be stored
- All that is left is a liberated awareness, pure consciousness without an object

Three Natures (*tri-svabhāva*)

1. Imaginary Nature (*parikalpita*)

Subject and object of cognition are imagined as real.

2. Dependent Nature (*paratantra*)

Phenomena arising in dependence upon causes and conditions

Conceptualization (*vikalpa*), or phenomenal consciousness, creator of imagined phenomena (*parikalpita*)

3. Thoroughly Established Nature (*pariniṣpanna*)

Thusness (*tathatā*), or emptiness

Correct knowledge (*samyag-jñāna*)

The Middle Way of Asaṅga

Thoroughly Established Nature is neither separate from conceptualization nor is it essentially the same.

It is present in a phenomenal awareness as being its universal property. This is the Middle Way.